

UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

Writing UCAS references

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The basics

Since the 2024 cycle, references have three sections:

- **Section One:** the school context
- **Section Two:** extenuating circumstances
- **Section Three:** other supporting information



References at Bath

- Every reference is read, and we *always* require an academic reference from a student's most recent educational institution
- References are not a significant factor in a decision – your predicted grades are more important
- We are particularly interested in extenuating circumstances, but other circumstances can be useful



Why we find subject-specific content less helpful

- We will not require subject-specific content in references
- We know these are offered as genuine endorsements of your students, and a huge amount of time and energy goes into making them
- We trust predicted grades as your indication of a student's performance
- The descriptions we see are hard to compare and relying on them too much leads to unfairness
- But we would **never** penalise an applicant because you choose to include more than we are looking for



What we're looking for: *Section One*

- Most schools and colleges are more confident in this section and have included something for like this for many years
- You can use the same section for every applicant - there is an option to bulk populate your answer on UCAS
- Things we find useful:
 - Pattern of qualifications offered to your students
 - Any disruption impacting your school/college as a whole
 - Your approach to predicted grades



What we're looking for: *Section Two*

- **Statement of overall academic performance** – for example, this is your opportunity to explain differences between previous and current grades
- **Any individual extenuating circumstances** – we consider extenuating (mitigating) circumstances very seriously and always welcome information. There are other ways to provide it if an applicant is uncomfortable with you including it here.
- **Subject limitations** – subjects play a big part of selection for some courses, so we want to know where an applicant's choices may have been restricted.



Extraneous/mitigating circumstances at Bath

- We take any extenuating circumstances very seriously – our mitigating circumstance approach is published online
- Applicants can also share their circumstances through our secure applicant portal, but they don't have to – your reference can be enough
- Extenuating circumstances from references will always be shared with student support colleagues if a student receives an offer – this is to help ensure any support needs are addressed as needed pre-arrival
- Mitigating circumstances can make a big difference on our decisions but will not always do so – it depends on how we assess the impact of the circumstances on a student's profile vs the selection criteria for the course
- We do not make contextual offers based on mitigating circumstances



Examples of extenuating circumstances

- **Personal illness or injury** – can be physical or mental health, acute or long-term
- **Late disability diagnoses or inadequate support** – especially if GCSEs affected
- **Family illness or injury** – for very close family members. May involve student taking on caring responsibilities.
- **Bereavement** – particularly for close family or friends
- **Disrupted home life**
- **School disruption** – significant teacher absences or school closures
- **Other emotionally distressing events**



How to address extenuating circumstances

When addressing sensitive personal circumstances, you do not need to go into significant detail of the circumstances themselves.

What matters to us is a sense of the impact on the student:

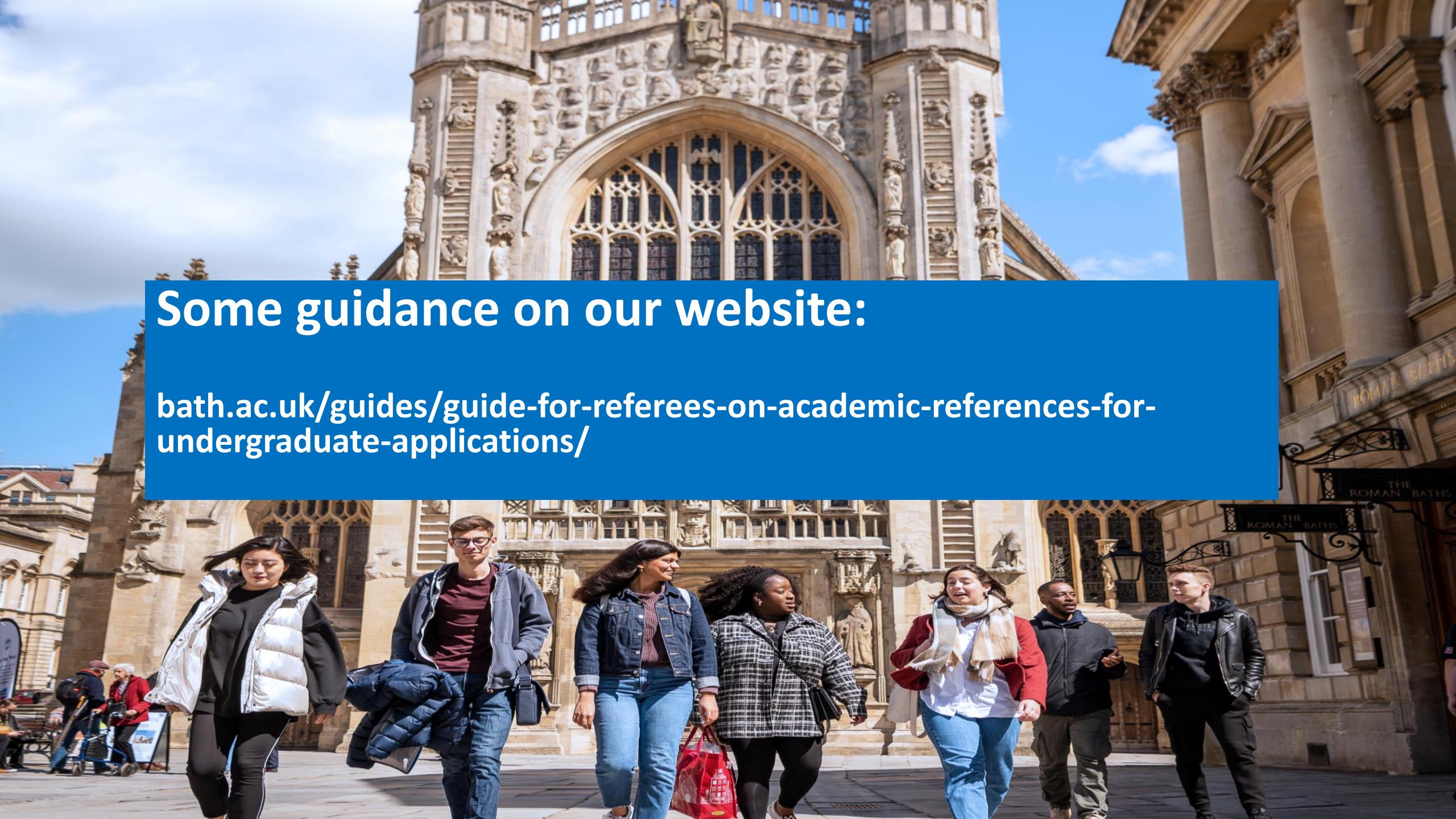
- **A brief description of the circumstances** – clear, specific, unambiguous
- **Timing of the circumstances** – when did they start and how long have they impacted
- **Your perspective on the academic impact, including to what extent you have considered it as part of your predicted grades**



What we're looking for: *Section Three*

- **Additional qualification information** – particularly subject specialisms or levels for students studying qualifications from outside the UK
- **Reasons for change of study/direction**
- **Significant extra-curricular commitments** – such as high-performance sport
- **Significant disciplinary action**
- **Boarding schools only** – if your school or college offers boarding and day school provision, it is helpful to know whether your applicant is boarding or not





Some guidance on our website:

bath.ac.uk/guides/guide-for-referees-on-academic-references-for-undergraduate-applications/